DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 078 741 HE 004 232

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TITLE The Politics of Higher Education During the Johnson Administration.
PUB DATE 73
NOTE 16p.; Speech prepared for the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, Louisiana, February 28, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Educational Change; Educational Finance; *Educational Innovation; Educational Legislation; *Federal Government; *Federal Legislation; Federal Programs; *Financial Support; *Higher Education; Politics; Speeches
IDENTIFIERS Johnson Administration

ABSTRACT

The Johnson Administration produced a significant proliferation of programs designed specifically to aid higher education. That those programs did not represent an overall strategy of institutional aid does not lessen the clear fact that the President was deeply committed to the concept of aid. The Congress was highly receptive to the Presidential initiatives and enacted broad new aid legislation. The new bureaucracy which was established to administer the program nurtured the new funds carefully in close collaboration with the clientele groups. The higher education associations behaved with more harmony than might have been expected and aided in the successful passage of the landmark Johnson legislation. In sum, policy formulation and implementation was a result of complex interactions and bargaining among the relevant political actors. (Author)

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THE POLITICS OF HIGHER EDUCATION DURING THE JOHNSON ADMINISTRATION

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HE 004 233

Prepared for Delivery at the 1973 Meeting of the

American Educational Research Association,

New Orleans, Louisiana, February 28, 1973

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THE POLITICS OF HIGHER EDUCATION DURING THE JOHNSON ADMINISTRATION

Introduction

After becoming President in 1963 Lyndon Johnson quickly made it known that education would receive high priority in his administration, and under his direction, the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963 and later the Higher Education Act of 1965 were guided through the Congress and signed into law. At the time, the Johnson policies in the field of federal aid to higher education seemed to herald a "golden age" of governmental activity. In retrospect, however, it appears that the Johnson era was one of transition; a time of committment to aiding colleges and universities as a primary goal, but a period during which an overall strategy or assessment of the impact of the programs enacted were not fully implemented. Persuading the Congress to enact as national policy a committment to higher education was the principal long-range target of Administration activity; therefore politically popular programs (such as the work-study program of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and the guaranteed loan program of 1965 Higher Education Act) were proposed, while more controversial plans for institutional aid were discarded.

History

As this nation entered the decade of the 1960s and as the post World War II "baby boom" began seriously affecting the financial condition of the country's institutions of higher education, there were significant

precedents for federal intervention and aid to the colleges and universities. The Morrill Act of 1862 provided a direct subsidy to land grant institutions to encourage education in "agriculture and the mechanical arts" and subsequent legislation provided annual financial support for those designated institutions. Various Depression-relief programs of the 1930s aided higher education, including the Public Works Administration (which provided loans and grants to states and municipalities for the construction of college facilities), the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (which paid for part-time employment of some 100,000 college students per month) and the National Youth Administration (which was the successor organization to FERA). During the Second World War, the government contracted with colleges and universities for scientific expertise in developing new and improved equipment and weapons for the military effort, and after the war's end, the Department of Defense, along with other agencies such as the National Science Foundation and the Atomic Energy Commission continued to "buy" university talent for research and development. The G.I. Bill, enacted soon after the war's end, gave financial aid to the returning veteran who wished to enter college, and the Housing Act of 1950 established federal loans for the construction of college housing. Finally, in 1958, in response to demands for better American education in the wake of the perceived threat posed by the launching of the first earth satellite by the Soviet Union, the Congress enacted the National Defense Education Act (NDEA), which provided for loans for college training in the sciences and languages. While the precedents for federal involvement

in higher education were well established by 1960, the earlier interventions had been sporadic and largely unplanned. None of the programs had been aimed at aiding colleges and universities, since their primary objectives had been to alleviate specific social problems (for example, economic relief, aid to veterans, improvement of the country's scientific education); helping higher education was only a secondary goal, a spin-off from the immediate task. The Kennedy Administration was committed to the notion of federal aid to higher education, but after its proposals were defeated by two successive sessions of Congress, the Administration retreated from concentrated attempts for passage.

The Johnson Era

In the wake of the Kennedy assassination, Lyndon Johnson soon let it be known that he hoped for early Congressional approval of the Higher Education Facilities Act. That Act, conceived during the Kennedy Administration and originally included in an Omnibus Education bill, had been separated out of that doomed package (doomed because it included proposals for aid to elementary and secondary education) and was finally signed into law on December 16, 1963 by the new President. Lawrence K. Pettit has written that "prior to the college facilities act of 1963 the support of higher education per se had not been legitimized by Congress as an appropriate federal activity."[1] Lyndon Johnson was committed to the notion of expanding that legitimacy.

In 1964, the President appointed an outside[2] task force on education, chaired by John W. Gardner, then President of the Carnegie Corporation and including among its members President Nixon's two Commissioners of

Education, Sidney P. Marland and James E. Allen, Jr. The confidential task force report was submitted to Mr. Johnson on November 16, 1964 and contained proposals which became the cores of the Administration's 1965 legislative program. That program included federal funding for undergraduate scholarships, expansion of the work-study program, a guaranteed student loan program, and institutional aid for developing institutions (all recommended by the Gardner group), as well as library aid and a community extension program.[3] With relatively little change or opposition the Congress enacted the Higher Education Act on October 14, 1965. At the ceremony for signing the Act, the President boasted

> I consider the Higher Education Act with its companion the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 . . . to be the keystones of the great, fabulous 89th Congress.[4]

Indeed, the Act was to be the most significant set of new programs for higher education enacted during the Johnson years.

Preoccupation with the War in Vietnam and the severe budget restraints imposed upon domestic spending by the military effort effectively precluded bold new programs. In the proposed 1966 Higher Education Amendments, the President attempted to phase out the NDEA direct loan program and replace it with loan guarantees and interest subsidies, which would be a less severe drain on the tightening federal budget, but the Congress refused to accept this plan. Other Amendments proposed and adopted in 1966 were largely technical in nature. An International Education Act to strengthen international affairs programs at colleges and universities was proposed by the Administration in 1966 and enacted by the Congress, but the House Appropriations Committee refused to fund the program. Again, in 1967 there was a minimum amount of higher education legislative

activity in the Congress. In 1967, the President appointed another secret outside task force, chaired by William C. Friday, President of the University of North Carolina. In its report to the President on June 30, 1967 the task force recommended significant legislative proposals, including institutional aid to colleges and universities in the amount of 10 percent of the institution's instructional cost plus $100 per student per year.[5] Faced with a budget-draining war, the Administration shelved the Friday recommendations and, instead, in 1968 proposed extension of NDEA, the Facilities Act and the Higher Education Act programs and added a series of new programs, which the Congress authorized but for which appropriations were not requested. It was a last attempt by the Johnson administration to cement, if only symbolically, the federal committment to a host of programs of aid to higher education.

The President and the Presidency

It is important to note that Lyndon Johnson was elected to office in 1964 by an overwhelming majority of votes and thus, the President perceived a "popular mandate" for action. In addition, it is clear that Johnson had singled out aid to education as a domestic issue of particular interest to him; he wanted, he said, to be remembered as the "Education President."[6] Johnson and his White House agents were the initiators of most proposals to aid higher education during his term of office. The President relied chiefly upon his task forces (especially the Gardner group) and the White House and Budget Bureau staffs as the primary sources for program proposals. Johnson thus attempted, with some success, to bypass the traditional channels of policy formulation---essentially

a winnowing up of ideas from the bureau level through the hierarchy of the executive department with close collaboration, especially at the earlier stages between bureau and interest group organizations.

The fact that the composition of the task forces as well as their recommendations were closely guarded secrets gave the President considerable flexibility in dealing with the interest groups.[7] He was not constrained to appoint members to the task forces from specific interest group organizations, and he was able to reject task force recommendations (as he did with the Friday proposals) with little public criticism. However, the President's attempt to bypass the bureaucracy and interest groups did not altogether succeed. Inevitably, the membership of the task forces became known among the elite of the Washington higher education associations, and as a former president of one of those organizations explained, "Of course, I knew Bill Friday well enough to pick up the phone and call him to let him know what we thought."[8] Nor was the bureaucracy completely shut out of the system. For example, after the Friday task force made its recommendations to the President, an interagency task force chaired by Commissioner of Education Harold Howe and staffed by the bureaucracy was established to react to the Friday proposals. This interagency group argued successfully that the Administration should not implement the Friday group's sweeping recommendations.[9]

The Johnson White House staff was unique in that one staff member, Douglass Cater, was specifically designated to work on education policy. Cater, as speech writer for the President during the 1964 campaign, had become familiar with education matters and become known to persons in the

education associations since many of Johnson's campaign addresses called for aid to education. On the White House staff, Cater served as a distinct and easy access point for the representatives of education interests.

Perhaps the most significant thrust of the Johnson Presidency regarding the patterns of federal aid to education was the clear attempt to open the opportunity for college education to the poor and disadvantaged. Tying the federal aid issues to "poverty" may have been good political strategy,[10] but it also seems to have clearly reflected the President's personal predeliction. At any rate, the work-study program of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 was designed to employ poor students (although it was later amended so that children of middle-income families could participate). The Higher Education Act of 1965 called for Educational Opportunity Grants (undergraduate scholarships for the needy), a Developing Institutions Program (institutional aid for small, financially weak, mostly all-black colleges), Talent Search (an effort to locate bright, but poor high school students who would be encouraged to go to college), and the Teacher Corps (a program to send experienced teachers and other college graduates into poverty area elementary and secondary school systems). In an effort to thwart potential criticism from the middle class, the Administration also proposed in the 1965 Act a Guaranteed Loan Program which would be available for students from families with incomes less than $15,000 per year.

As might be expected, the President's active personal intervention into the higher education policy subsystem was sporadic and only occasional but when he did chose to become involved he could be persuasive

and effective. For example, it seems that the sudden clearance of the Higher Education Bill of 1965 by the House Education and Labor Committee on June 24, 1965 was a direct result of White House calls to the Committee chairman. Clearance was achieved only after a hastily summoned meeting, and one Republican charged that although he had hurried from his office after being notified of the meeting, he had not arrived at the committee room in time to participate in the final vote.[11] Another example of personal Presidential action occurred on July 2, 1965, when Johnson, in a speech before the National Education Association unveiled his plans to include the controversial Teacher Corps proposal in his 1965 legislative program. Apparently the President, wanting a surprise announcment to reveal to the teachers, decided to embrace the Teacher Corps idea, which had been formulated initially by the staffs of Senator Gaylord Nelson (Dem.-Wisc.) and Edward Kennedy (Dem.-Mass.), even though the House Committee on Education and Labor had already held hearings and voted on the President's higher education proposals, which had not until the NEA address included the Teacher Corps.

The Congress

During the Johnson years, the principle role of the Congress in the field of higher education aid was as a reactor to Presidential initiative and overseer of program implementation. As a "reactor" the Congress generally gave Johnson widespread bipartisan support for his higher education proposals, except for the President's attempt to phase out the NDEA loan program. A number of the Administration's recommendations were changed in detail, but the general substance of most

remained unscathed by the Congress. In its oversight function, the House Education and Labor Committee and the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee watched closely over the administration of the new programs enacted by the Congress. The apex of oversight came in 1966, when the Special Subcommittee on Education, under the chairmanship of Edith Green (Dem.-Oregon) conducted a six month study of the United States Office of Education and issued a 777 page report of detailed comments on the administration of aid to education programs.[12]

In a study of the House Education and Labor Committee, Richard Fenno concluded that one principal characteristic of the Committee was that there was little expertise on education matters among its members.[13] By the mid-1960s, however, a number of committee members had developed an interest in and knowledge about federal aid to education, notably Edith Green, John Brademas (Dem-Ind.) and Albert Quie (Rep.-Minn.). Likewise, although Fenno concluded that the Committee was highly factionalized and partisan, an analysis of key full House votes during the period 1958-1965 reveals that the Education and Labor Committee members gave significant bipartisan support to higher education aid.[14] A similar analysis of key Senate votes during the same period indicates even stronger bipartisan support from Labor and Public Welfare Committee members.[15]

The Bureaucracy

With the Higher Education Facilities Act already on the statute books and with some confidence that the Higher Education Act of 1965 would soon become law, the Office of Education (U.S.O.E.) in late 1964 began planning

organizational methods of dealing with the administration of these massive new programs. The Office had long been a rather sleepy, statistics-gathering bureaucracy, dominated by the National Education Association and elementary and secondary education interests. U.S.O.E. was hardly an agency equipped to administer the programs soon to be enacted by the Congress or to develop working relationships with the interest group associations of higher education. Therefore, the Office of Education created the Bureau of Higher Education (BHE) on January 1, 1965 as the organization within O.E. charged with the implementation of the higher education aid programs and appointed Peter Muirhead, a long-time U.S.O.E. bureaucrat, familiar to the higher education circles in Washington, as bureau chief.

At its inception the fledgling bureau faced an uncertain future. The Office of Education had been subject to many reorganizations in the past and the prospect for further reorganization could not be discounted. Innumerable federal agencies already operated in the area of aid to higher education and could be expected to be jealous of the relationships which they had established with representatives of colleges and universities. Finally, the bureau was confronted with the overwhelming fact that it would be expected to administer over one billion dollars in federal aid during fiscal year 1966.[16] Within one year the Bureau's personnel increased by about 225%.

Confronted with such a job, the Bureau of Higher Education turned to the higher education community and especially to the organized interests of higher education for support and help. The Bureau relied heavily upon the Washington higher education associations for recommendations and suggestions for staffing of the new agency.[17] B.H.E. held informal

meetings in nine cities across the country in the Fall of 1965 to explain the new programs to local higher education officialdom and to get the advice and counsel from those groups. Soon after the creation of the agency, the bureau chief began scheduling monthly meetings among representatives of the Washington based higher education interest groups, himself and members of his staff to get a regularized input from the Bureau's clientele groups. In short, the Bureau carefully cultivated its relationships with the organized interests and over time was able to establish an easy and friendly rapport with the higher education groups.

The Interest Group Associations

American higher education is justly proud of its long history of diversity and flexibility; we have public universities and private colleges, large institutions and small experimental ones, church-supported schools and sectarian colleges. This diversity, however, has presented some difficulties in devising federal aid plans which appear equitable to all classes of institutions.

The varying patterns of higher education are reflected in the organized interest groups which increasingly have acted as representatives of the individual colleges and universities in Washington. The largest such organization, most often viewed as the "spokesman" for higher education as a whole is the American Council on Education, an umbrella-type group composed of membership of both individual colleges and universities as well as of other interest group associations. Other important associations include the National Association of State Universities and

Land Grant Colleges, the Association of American Colleges, and the American Association of Junior Colleges. Each association faces particular problems in taking formal positions on federal aid proposals, for the interest of each organization's clientele differs from the others. For example, the American Council must reconcile considerable differences of opinion among its large, heterogenous membership and may, at times, have to remain silent on an issue which badly divides its membership.

During the mid-1960s, however, the higher education associations seem to have finally realized that only by presenting a united front to the Congress in support of higher education aid legislation could they expect to gain any legislation at all. The American Council on Education seems to have been in the forefront of this attempt to build broad agreement among higher education interests. As Pettit writes,

> Not only did the American Council develop a consensus on priorities and on the need for construction grants, but also graudally it eliminated dissensional issues, such as tax credits and scholarships, so that by 1963 nearly all representatives of American higher education were concentrating their resources toward the enactment of legislation in the area where they agreed. The groups were functionally oriented toward a goal of the higher education system itself, where previously they had been concerned primarily with the protection of the positions of their own specific types of institutions.[18]

In addition to this mending of internal differences, the education associations during the mid-1960s seem to have developed a much more sophisticated awareness of the art of legislative lobbying and of presenting their case to Congress and its committees. However, the professional staffs of the associations still tended to shun

high-pressure lobbying tactics; instead they responded to Congressional requests for information and advice, avoiding an aggressive stance.[19]

Summary

The Johnson Administration produced a significant proliferation of programs designed specifically to aid higher education. That those programs did not represent an over-all strategy of institutional aid does not lessen the clear fact that the President was deeply committed to the concept of aid. The Congress was highly receptive to the Presidential initiatives and enacted broad new aid legislation. The new bureaucracy which was established to administer the programs nurtured the new funds carefully in close collaboration with the clientele groups. The higher educatin associations themselves behaved with more harmony than might have been expected and aided in the successful passage of the landmark Johnson legislation. In sum, policy formulation and implementation was a result of complex interactions and bargaining among the relevant political actors, a pattern of activity much like what Cater terms, "subgovernment."[20]

FOOTNOTES

1. Lawrence Kay Pettit, "The Policy Process in Congress: Passing the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Political Science, 1965), p. 37.

2. The term "outside" task force is used to distinguish these groups from the interagency task forces which were also widely used by Johnson.

3. Though the task forces' memberships and reports were closely kept secrets during the Johnson years, they have been released by the Johnson library in Austin, Texas. The full texts of the Gardner and Friday task force reports pertaining to higher education may be found in The Chronicle of Higher Education, VI (February 7, 1972), 3-7. Also, see Philip W. Semas, "Release of Lyndon Johnson's Higher Education Papers Brings Long-Secret Task-Force Reports to Light," The Chronicle of Higher Education, VI (February 7, 1972), 1, 2.

4. "Text of the President's Talk on Higher Education Act," New York Times, November 9, 1965, p. 1.

5. Semas, "Release of Lyndon Johnson's Higher Education Papers," 2.

6. Ian E. McNett, "He Wanted to be "Education President," The Chronicle of Higher Education, II (April 8, 1968), 3.

7. Thomas Cronin, "The Presidency and Education," Phi Delta Kappan, XLIX (February 1968), 295.

8. Confidential interview.

9. Semas, "Release of Lyndon Johnson's Higher Education Papers," 2.

10. New York Times, January 17, 1965, p. IV: 11.

11. See remarks by Albert Quie, 89:1 Congressional Record (1965), p. 21830.

12. U.S. Congress, House Committee on Education and Labor, Special Subcommittee on Education, Report: Study of the United States Office of Education. 90th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967).

13. Richard Fenno, "The House of Representatives and Federal Aid to Education," in Robert L. Peabody and Nelson W. Plsby (eds.), New Perspectives on the House of Representatives, (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963), p. .

14. An analysis of eleven roll call votes in the House during the period 1958-1965 reveals that 96.3% of Democratic members of the House Education and Labor Committee supported aid to higher education, 50.1% of Republican members supported aid, with a Committee average of 79.6% in support.

15. An analysis of seven roll call votes in the Senate during the period 1958-1965 reveals that 91.6% of Democratic members of the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee supported aid to higher education, 60.9% of Republican members supported aid, with a Committee average of 81.5% in support.

16. In fact, Bureau programs would total $1.099 billion. In FY 1967 the agency total peaked at $1.488 billion and declined to $1.366 billion for FY 1968.

17. Confidential interview.

18. Pettit, pp. 188-189.

19. For example, in an interview one professional staff member of an interest group organization noted that he seldom went up to Capitol Hill, unless he had been asked to testify. He emphasized that he could not be found lurking in the hall of the Congress.

20. Douglass Cater, Power in Washington (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), p. 20.